American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Honoring those who served our country

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World War I formally ended at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. In 1954, Veteran's Day, Nov. 11, was designated to honor all who have served in our nation's armed forces. American Airlines has a long-standing commitment to serving the military community, which includes many of our fellow team members. Today and every day, American thanks those who have defended this country. #AATeam member Derek Davidson is one of those heroes. Read his story below.

PROVING THEM WRONG

From an early age, I've made it my mission to prove I could do anything I was told I couldn't and set my sights on great things. At 11, a movie I saw sparked a passion for aviation. Since then, I haven't looked back. But that didn't come without challenges and a lot of hard work along the way.

In high school, I applied to the United States Air Force Academy. I did not get the appointment and even more disappointing, I was also told — by a friend's dad, nonetheless — that I would just become another statistic and never leave my small town. And that motivated me to work even harder. So, I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force.

I started my military career as a B-1 Bomber electrical and environmental systems specialist, and eventually moved over to Flight Engineering before graduating at the top of my class in my flight schools. I flew combat missions and special presidential assignments for 14 years, racking up 4,000 flight hours — but as much as I loved serving my country, I knew it was time to take a step back.

In 2009, I became a military trainer at the Air Force Academy and grew to love the art of teaching. Having the ability to mentor our future leaders brought me a lot of joy and satisfaction.

After I retired, I accepted a position at the American Airlines Flight Training department, where I continue my teaching career — just with pilots this time. I love being around aircraft and sharing my experiences with colleagues and fellow aviators. I truly believe in our goal here — to always be the best and safest in the industry, and to take care of every customer and team member who steps on our aircraft.

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As a veteran, I'm grateful, for a lot. I think it's important to take the time to support our nation's heroes and the sacrifices they and their families have made.

One group of heroes I enjoy learning from are the Tuskegee Airmen — the first Black military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps (which later became the Air Force). A couple years ago, I was lucky enough to present these trailblazers with honorary captain plaques. Tuskegee Airmen are truly representative of the power in proving people wrong.

They broke barriers and opened up new possibilities for future Black leaders following in their footsteps (or flight paths, I should say), proving the effects of persistency, dedication and good old-fashioned hard work.

Nowadays, I take the time to enjoy my new wife and three sons and look back in appreciation of my past and those who tried so hard to knock me down. I was raised in a small town by my father's parents. I was picked on and bullied and wasn't good at sports. But even while facing adversity, I found what I was good at — science — and turned it into a passion that has lasted me a lifetime.

I live my dream each and every day, not just for myself, but for this airline and for our customers. It's our pleasure to serve you on your journey — wherever it might take you.

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